The Pennsylvania German Contribution to the American Vocabulary

By PAUL SCHACH

ALTHOUGH the influence of English on the Pennsylvania-German dialect has been frequently (albeit not always accurately) commented on, the contribution of the Pennsylvania Germans to the vocabulary of American English has until quite recently not received the attention it deserves. The amount of space devoted to words of Pennsylvania-German origin in three scholarly works on American English published within the last few years, however, indicates an increasing awareness of the significance of this contribution. **Supplement II** to the fourth edition of H. L. Mencken's well-known book **The American Language** (New York, 1948), lists a considerable number of borrowings from Pennsylvania German, some of which were supplied by my good friend Professor F. W. Gingrich of Albright College. Professor Hans Kurath's stimulating and informative survey **A Word Geography of the Eastern United States** (University of Michigan Press, 1949) also contains quite a few regionalisms which are familiar to residents of Berks County and adjacent areas. By far the most fascinating and fruitful source of information on this problem, however, is **A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles** (University of Chicago Press, 1951), edited by Dr. Mitford M. Mathews. In this dictionary we find not merely definitions and etymologies for each entry of non-English origin, but also copious quotations illustrating the use of the word from its earliest known written occurrence. To Dr. Mathews I am indebted for some of the illustrations as well as for much of the word material used in this article.

In the narrower sense, the term Pennsylvania-German designates the dialect, predominantly Palatinate in its chief linguistic features, which is still spoken by about three quarters of a million persons in eastern Pennsylvania, in parts of Ontario, and in small speech islands throughout the Midwest. Most of the terms discussed here are borrowings or adaptations from this dialect. It must be kept in mind, however, that the Germans in Pennsylvania retained Standard German as a written language until well past the middle of the nineteenth century. Consequently we shall have to consider also the words derived from their written language if we hope to gain an adequate appreciation of the extent of their contribution to American English.

Probably the most famous contribution of this kind is the title **The Father of His Country,** which was bestowed upon George Washington by Francis Bailey. On the cover of his **Nord-Amerikanischer Kalender** for the year 1779 (published in Lancaster, Pa.) there was a flying Fame with a medallion of Washington. Sounding from her trumpet were the words "Des Landes Vater." But while Bailey's use of this title is in all probability the immediate source of the English term, he can scarcely be credited with having originated it; for since the word **Landesvater** at that time was the common designation for a ruler or sovereign, it was the natural and proper title for the man who, even before his election to the presidency, was regarded by many as their military and political leader.

Religious Terminology

In view of the fact that so many German-speaking immigrants came to Pennsylvania in search of religious freedom, we are not surprised to find a strong degree of German and Pennsylvania-German influence among denominational names. Such words as **Amish, Moravian, Mennonite** (with its variant forms of **Mennist** and **Mennonist**) clearly reflect this influence. From the time the **Church of the Brethren** was founded in 1708 at Schwarzenau, Germany, the members of this church body have referred to each other as **Brueder**. The earliest recorded use of the English equivalent **Brethren** occurs in 1822 in the **Annals of the Seventeenth Congress** (I Sess. I. 230. It is specifically stated here that the Brethren then "began to be known" by that name. **Dunker,** the widely-used nickname of this denomination, is a Pennsylvania-German loan word. Originally a term of contempt, **Dunker** (which means literally 'dipper,' in reference to the practise of trine immersion) seems to have lost its earlier derisive connotation. **Dunkard,** which Lambert lists in his well-known Pennsylvania-German dictionary as the "English" meaning of the dialect word, is merely a distortion of **Dunker.** Other nicknames which were formerly used in reference to this denomination are **Tunker** (the Standard German equivalent of **Dunker**), **Taufer** (from German **Taeufer,** 'baptizer') and **Dumpler.** This word seems to be the Pennsylvania-German form of Low German **Dompelaar** or **Dompelaer,** which was used as early as 1719 in Germany by state and church officials to designate the Brethren in Creyfeld.

Of the denominations which were founded by the Germans in Pennsylvania, the largest is the **Evangelical United Brethren Church,** which today has a membership of almost 800,000 in America and of about 80,000 in Germany, Switzerland and Alsace. Here we can merely sketch the complicated history of this denominational name. Prior to their merger in 1946, the **Church of the United Brethren in Christ** and the **Evangelical Church** were independent church bodies. Traditionally the name of the former dates from the first meeting of its founders, Philip Wilhelm Otterbein and Martin Boehm at a **Grosse Versammlung** held at Long's Farm in Lancaster County some time in 1766-68. Otterbein was a learned German theologian, who had come to America as a missionary of the German Reformed Church. Deeply moved by the fervent preaching of Boehm, an uneducated Mennonite, Otterbein embraced him with the exclamation **"Wir sind Brueder!"** In order to distinguish themselves from the many other varieties of Brethren groups which then existed or were arising during that time of religious ferment in Pennsylvania, the followers of Otterbein and Boehm called themselves **Vereinigte Brueder.** But this did not suffice, since the Moravians (**Unitas Fratrum**) were also known as **United Brethren.** Finally the name **Die Gemeinschaft der Vereinigten Brueder in Christo,** 'The Association of the United Brethren in Christ,' was agreed upon. The official name of this church body before **1946** is thus a literal translation from the German, with the substitution of the word 'Church' for 'Association.'

Shortly after it was founded **by Jacob Albrecht** in 1800, **the Evangelical Church** was given the name **Evangelische Gemeinschaft,** which has been retained by the European branch of this church, organized in 1850. As English gradually replaced German in this denomination, the original German name also had to give way to the translated form **Evangelical Association,** which in time was changed to **Evangelical Church.** It is interesting to note that the nickname **Strawweler,** which is sometimes used in **referring humorously or contemptuously to the Evangelicals,** is also current in the Saar as **a** nickname for the Anabaptists. The basic meaning of the verb **strawwele,** from which this noun is derived, is 'to kick and struggle.' In Alsace and Lorraine it has the additional meaning 'to behave in a confused or rash manner,' while in the Palatinate it is more often used to describe a confused and overhasty way of speaking. It is not difficult to see how this rather inelegant but not altogether inappropriate appellative came to be applied to a group of people filled with (and sometimes overcome by) religious zeal and enthusiasm.

The name of the **Seventh-Day German Baptists,** the sect which seceded from the **Brethren** and built the Ephrata cloisters, is also an adaptation from the German. While the earliest use of the English title recorded in the **Dictionary of Americanisms** is from the year 1867, Conrad Weiser used the term **Siebentaeger** as early as 1752 in a letter to Count von Zinzendorf.

Because of consideration of space, the fascinating problem of personal and place names of German and PaG origin cannot be discussed in this article. It should be pointed out in passing, however, that names of newspapers and journals often reflect German influence. The Reading **Adler,** for instance, was founded in 1796, while the **Eagle** did not come into existence until 1869, almost a century later. **Der Christliche Botschafter** likewise antedated the **Evangelical Messenger** by several decades. Similar examples could be cited for other communities and denominations of German background.

Food Terminology

Since the excellence of the Pennsylvania-German cuisine has become almost legendary, we would expect at least some food names to be adopted along with the dishes themselves. Among those listed in the **Dictionary of Americanisms** we find **Apee (cake), paanhaas, schnitz** (with its compound **schnitz und gnepp** and **schnitz pie**), **smearcase** and **speck** (along with **speck and beans and sauerkraut and speck**). All of these words deserve at least brief comment.

The word **apee cake** is a partial translation of Pennsylvania-German **eepikuche,** which in turn is derived from French **pain d'epice.** The French word, which means literally 'spice bread' or 'spice loaf,' is generally explained as 'gingerbread' in bilingual dictionaries. Actually, however, this word denotes a popular honey-flavored cake for which Dijon is as famous as Nurnberg is for **Lebkuchen.** Lambert lists only the form **eepies** (with correct etymology) in the sense of 'cooky, Christmas cooky (frequently cut in the shape of animals)'. How did this French word get to Pennsylvania via Germany? Unable to find the word in any German dialect dictionary, I recently wrote to Professor Walter Mitzka of the University of Marburg for information. Professor Mitzka, director of the **Deutscher Sprachatlas** and the editor of the **Zeitschrift fuer Mundartforschung,** forwarded my request to Professor Ernst Christmann of Kaiserslautern, who is one of the greatest living experts on the Palatine dialects. Professor Christmann assured me that the word **eepikuche** is not known in the Palatinate, and requested information regarding its appearance and manner of preparation. The French origin of the word plus its present geographic spread permit one to hazard the guess that the word was brought to America by the German-speaking Huguenots; for while **eepikuche** and its English form **apee cake** are current in and around the Oley Valley, they seem to be virtually unknown in the western part of the Pennsylvania-German area. Indeed, these dry breakfast cakes similar to shoefly cakes are there called **Dutch Cakes.** It might be added here that popular etymology has connected this French-German-American word with **A. P. (Ann Page) cakes!**

Although still in use as far west as Ohio (cf. Kurath, p. 32) the much-discussed word **pannhaas** seems to be losing ground in the competition with **scrapple.** This may be due at least in part to the fact that the English term is so frequently seen in advertisements of this delectable dish.

A schnitz (or snitz) is, of course, a slice of dried fruit (usually dried apple unless otherwise specified). Out of deference to friends and relatives who relish the dish more than I, I shall not comment on **schnitz und gnepp** (dried apples and dumplings boiled with ham). **Schnitz pie,** on the other hand, is quite as nourishing, but less jarring to the gustatory sense. **Schnutz, a** variant of **schnitz** (not listed in the **Dictionary** of Americanisms), also refers to sections of fresh fruit. A section of orange, for example, is commonly called an **orange schnutz.**

In marked contrast to the sad fate of **pannhass** and especially of **apee cake,** which has remained restricted to a very small area in spite of its colorful and somewhat questionable international background, the lowly word **Schmierkees** has spread far beyond its original Pennsylvania-German homeland. In the anglicised form **smearcase,** as Professor Kurath has pointed out, it has become a general designation for cottage cheese not only throughout the state of Pennsylvania, but also in all of Delaware and Maryland and in parts of Virginia and West Virginia. It is also current in a large area of Ontario, as well as in numerous communities in the Midwest. It might be added that Professor Kurath has also recorded the rather unappetizing loan translation **smear cheese.**

Speck has a much finer pedigree than many persons realize. With the possible exception of Gothic, it existed in all the older Germanic tongues including Old English, where it appeared in the form **spic.** Following the unfortunate incident of 1066 (sometimes called the Norman Conquest), **spic** was replaced in English by the more genteel French word **bacon** (which, however, came originally from Old High German). Thus the Pennsylvania Germans, by contributing **Speck** to the vocabulary of American English, have merely restored this word to its rightful place in the language after an absence of several centuries.

To be concluded

DIE GROOSSVADDERS UHR

Do schteh ich hie bei Daag un Nacht—
Vun mir nemm Beischpiel un nemm acht!
Wie ich dich dien, so dien aa du
Dei liewer Gott bis in die Ruh.

Ich bin schunn alt! Mei Gsicht weist's gans,
'S iss abgebleecht in Farb un Glans;
Fer'n hunnert Yaahr un deel dezu
Halt ich die Zeit, froog net fer Luh.

Ich schteh im Eck un kumm net weit,
Doch bin am Geh, geb dir die Zeit;
So wie mei Gsicht dir weist die Schtunn,
So duh du gleich wie Zeit geht rum;
Un sei gedrei wie ich do waar
Im lange Laaf—en hunnert Yaahr!

—D. GEO. KNECHT

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(Conclusion)

The Germans of Pennsylvania deserve at least a share of the credit for introducing the words **cruller, pretzel,** and **waffle** into English. Dr. Mathews derives **cruller** from Holland Dutch. In view of the fact that this kind of fried sweet cake is as popular in Southeastern Pennsylvania as it is in New York, it seems likely that the word and the object it designates were introduced in these two areas by the Dutch and the Germans independently. The geographic distribution of this word (see Kurath, Figure 14) tends to verify this assumption. **Pretzel or Bretzel** is, as Dr. Mathews states, a loanword from Standard German. But where can one find **good** pretzels in such variety and abundance as in Reading and Berks County? **Waffle**, of course, is of Dutch origin, and in the New York area represents a borrowing directly from Dutch. Since this word came into German at a very early date, it can probably be regarded as a German loanword in the Pennsylvania-German area. **Waffle** iron can then be considered to be a translation of both Dutch **wafelijzer** and of German **Waffeleisen.**

In this connection we might mention **also** the word **bake oven**, which may possibly have been translated independently from Dutch **bakoven** and from German **Backofen**. The fact that the first quotation in the **Dictionary of Americanisms** is from the **Maryland Gazette** (1787) lends support to the assumption of a German source of this word, since the "Pennsylvania" Germans in colonial times extended well into Maryland and Virginia. **Cannon stove**, too, is probably a translation from **Kanonenofen**, which was in use for at least a century in Germany before it first made its appearance in America around the middle of the eighteenth century. Since the Pennsylvania Germans have long been famous for their stoves, it is not unlikely that other stove names stem from either their written or spoken language.

Among the more common food names peculiar to this area not listed in the **Dictionary of Americanisms** we find **fat cake** and **faasnacht**, both designations for the raised doughnut. The first is a translation of Pennsylvania-German **Fettkuche (G. Fettkuchen)**; the second, especially popular around Reading, is an abbreviated form of Pennsylvania German **Faasnachtkuche (G. Fastnachtskuchen)**, so called from the custom of eating doughnuts on Shrove Tuesday. In parts of Berks County a layer cake is called a **high cake** in English and a **Hochkuche** in the dialect. Which came first is not readily discernible. Throughout the PaG area curdled milk is called **thick milk**, a translation of **dicki Millich (G. dicke Milch)**. The loanword **kuddelfleck** is used in some localities as a designation for tripe. **Salad**, which is the common appellation for garden greens south of the Mason and Dixon line, here denotes lettuce through the influence of PaG **Salaat** (German **Salat**). Accordingly garden lettuce and head lettuce are here generally called **garden salad** and **head salad**, translations of **Gaardesalaat** and **Koppsalaat**. **Riwwel soup** is precisely what its name states: a soup made of **riwwels**. These are small lumps of dough which are rubbed in the hands; hence the name, since **riwwele** is a diminutive of **reiwe (G. reiben)**, 'to rub.' **Riwwel cakes** have sweetened **riwwels** as a covering. **Schleck** as a designation for sweets seems to be a household word in many German-American families. And finally, the word **piece** is used quite generally in referring to a between-meals **'snack.'** A morning lunch served in the fields during harvest or haying time is called in Pennsylvania German a **Neinuhrstick**, 'nine-o-clock-piece.' From this loanword was derived the verb **to piece** in the sense of 'to snack.' This in turn was re-borrowed by the dialect in the form **piesse**, 'to snack.'

Miscellaneous Borrowings

Sometimes users of PaG loanwords who do not know their background try so hard to make these words meaningful that they distort them almost beyond recognition. Who, for example, would recognize the word **warmus** as a popular etymology of PaG **Wammes**, 'jumper, jacket'? While the word occurs in the German form in the **Lancaster Intelligencer** (Nov. 12, 1805) and in Everett N. Dick's recent novel **The Dixie Frontier** (New York, 1948, p. 297), the "English" form is used in the **Southern Literary Messenger** for the year 1841 (VII, 525/1) and in Henry Howe's **Historical Collections of Ohio** (Cincinnati, 1847, p. 254). The process of etymologizing is strikingly illustrated by the following quotation from Edward Eggelston's **The End of the World** (New York, 1872, p. 40):

> Instead of a coat he wore that unique garment of linsey-woolsey known in the West as wa-mus (warm us?), a sort of over-shirt.

The two PaG loanwords which seem to have gained the widest currency outside of their original homeland are **hex** and **dunk**. The former has become especially popular with sports writers. Scarcely a week goes by that one does not see such headlines as "Bums Hex Chumps" or "Lions Retain Hex over Eagles." In part, at least, the amazing spread of this word can be explained by the interest in the so-called "hex-marks" on PaG barns and by occasional, somewhat lurid newspaper stories about "hex-doctors." The mere title of such a book as Ann Hark's **Hex Marks the Spot** (New York, 1938) would suffice to impress the word strongly upon the public mind. How firmly entrenched **hex** has become in the American language is demonstrated by the fact that the **Dictionary of Americanisms** devotes almost one entire column to it and its derivatives **hexer, hexerei,** and **verhext**. **Dunk** also has become naturalized. It appears frequently in national journals and in advertisements for baked goods and beverages. Indeed, the manufacturers of a certain well-known fountain pen recently made the claim that they have succeeded in eliminating "dunk filling."

Less fortunate are **putz, rutschi,** and **brummer**, which have remained localisms in spite of all attempts to popularize them. **Putz** is largely restricted to the Allentown-Bethlehem area, although it is occasionally heard elsewhere. Even though it has appeared regularly in the local newspapers for years, the noun **rutschi** seems to be confined almost completely to Reading, where it is the common designation for a sledding place. The related verb **rutsch**, 'to slide, squirm', on the other hand, is very widespread. And **brummer** as a designation for a factory whistle, especially of the fog-horn type, never quite made the grade in spite of the fact that it appeared in the **Lebanon News** on Jan. 20, 1898, in an article that was reprinted in the **Congressional Record** the same year (Feb. 1506/1).

Of the many animal names borrowed from Pennsylvania German, the following are typical: **biepi or piepi**, 'small chicken'; **hammi**, 'calf'; **hutschi**, 'colt'; **mulli**, 'tadpole'; and **wutzi**, 'young pig'. With the exception of **hutschi** and **mulli**, these words are used also as calls to the designated animals.

One of the most widespread and frequently heard PaG loanwords is **stenner**, which is used to designate a round metal or cardboard container. Thus one speaks of a **stenner** of lard or a **stenner** of ice cream. For years I derived a great deal of fiendish glee out of tricking students into using this word and then innocently asking them to spell it. Oddly enough, this extremely common loanword seems to have escaped the attention of all students of this problem, while **tutt**, 'paper bag,' which is much less frequently heard, turns up on almost all lists of "Pennsylvania-English" words. Incidentally, **tutt** usually rimes with **put**, not with **toot**.

The vocabulary of sports, as one would expect, reveals almost no German influeuce. The only PaG contribution of any importance that I can think of at the moment is **corner ball**, a translation of **Eckballe**. If this word, the name of a popular children's game, existed only in Pennsylvania German and in Standard German, one might suspect it of being a translation from the English. But since the noun and the corresponding verb **eckballe(n)**, 'to play corner ball,' are current in the dialects of Alsace, the **Palatinate** and the Saar, it is quite obvious that the word is German and not English in origin.

The PaG dialect abounds in colorful descriptive adjectives and forceful verbs, many of which have crept into the English of this area. **Dappig, schusslich,** and **strubbly** seem somehow to have connotations which are lacking in the more insipid English equivalents 'awkward', 'clumsy', and 'unkempt'. A person who is **piensy** is not merely 'sickly' or 'ailing'. It is much more soul-satisfying to **blotz** someone you dislike than merely to 'punch' or to 'poke' him. The verbs **brutz, grecks,** and **spritz** are inadequately rendered by 'sulk', 'grunt', and 'squirt'.

Like old soldiers and all other things transitory, words flourish for a season and then fade away. This has been the fate of the fascinating word **hay barrack**. Although still used in parts of New York (it is listed by both Kurath and Mathews), this term seems practically to have disappeared from active use in the **PaG** area. **Hay barrack**, or simply **barrack**, denotes a square haystack which is protected from rain and snow by a sliding roof. At first glance one might associate this word with PaG **Barrick (G. Berg)**, 'mountain', since **Berg** is frequently used metaphorically to refer to piles or heaps of various kinds. Actually, however, the word **means** not 'mountain of hay' but 'protection for hay'. In New York **hay barrack** represents an adaptation of Dutch **hooiberg**, while in Pennsylvania it can be regarded as a partial translation of **G. Heuberge.**

Although I have absolutely no documentary evidence to support this assumption, I have a feeling that the second element of **Conestoga wagon** was originally **Wagen**. Since the Pennsylvania Germans built these sturdy wagons, which, incidentally, were sometimes called "Dutch wagons," it seems only fitting and proper, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, to credit them also with naming them.

A brief sketch like this can make no claim to an exhaustive treatment of the subject. The lists of words of various types could have been extended considerably, and in several instances more detailed etymologies could have been given. The chief purpose of this paper, however, was not to exhaust the subject, but rather to emphasize the significance and the extent of the contribution the Pennsylvania Germans have made to the American vocabulary. Some of the words, such as **apee cake**, have such fascinating international histories that I could not resist the temptation to discuss them in considerable detail. In the case of several other terms, thanks largely to the encyclopedic knowledge of **Dr. Mathews**, we were able to see how localisms and regionalisms like **hex, dunk,** and **wammes** creep into the written language and thus spread far beyond their original homeland.

Reprint from The Historical Review of Berks County.
By Courtesy of the Editor, Donald Radcliffe Shenton.

SEI ZUFRIDDE

Ich waar doyets mol drauss im Land—
Wie hibsch waar alles rum
Ich hab gedenkt, es iss en Schand,
Wie Schtadtleit sin so dumm.

Ich hab gedenkt, was geht verfehlt
Bei all de liewe Leit,
Wu alles iss so ausgedeelt
In Lewe, Blatz un Zeit.

Datt iss dann mol die gut frisch Luft,
Wie Wei drinkt mer sie ei;
Un uffem Graas der Maryeduft,
Wu glenst im Sunneschei.

Geruch vun Grund frisch uffgedreht—
Guck yuscht wie luck un schee!
Der Wind wu drauss der Weeze weht,
Wie Welle uffem See!

Die frische obscht, die sehnich drauss,
Net uffgedrickelt, welk;
Die Blumme iwwer Felder naus,
Die Kieh wu ich als melk.

Un oweds wann's mol duschber watt,
Wann Aerwet iss geduh,
Do iss ken Zucht die gans Nacht fatt,
Wu halt em vun der Ruh.

Schtatts Gricksel un der Hawwergees,
Die Niedieps un die Eil,
Die hen ihr Lied—'s iss schee, ich weess,
Die singen all die Weil.

Un Draam uff Aaggedeckel mied,
Die fallen sanft wie Daa,
Weil Freschlin singen Schlummerlied—
All des un viel meh aa.

Dann bleib zufridde, Bauersmann,
Uff deine Bauerei;
Die Schtadt hot nix es biede kann,
Des kann mer sehne glei.

In Summer schaffscht du hadder vleicht,
Doch hoscht du was defor;
Im Winter iss die Aerwet leicht
Un Sache sin net ror.

Drum saag ich widder, halt Geduld
Un sei ken Wunnernaas;
Schaffscht wie du witt un hoscht ken Schuld,
Un bischt dei eegner Baas.

15. April 1937 —RALPH S. FUNK.